

You're never as
right as when you
admit you're wrong

Herbert Kaufman's Weekly Page

Trials are but files
to rasp men into
form

What They Didn't Tell You at Commencement

By HERBERT KAUFMAN

The distinguished high-brows whose commencement grandiloquence have just assured you of your superiority to the *common run* of mortals, are prone to *overestimate* the *impressiveness* of a *degree*. That's because they know almost *everything* except *practical* conditions.

A diploma simply tells us that your theoretical instruction is *ended* and your *real* education *still* to start. You aren't aware of a *single* thing that we haven't *already* learned. Colleges are *canning plants* where heads are filled with information secured and *preserved* by experience.

You're informed on more subjects than folks who couldn't afford a *personally* conducted tour through Literature and History, but you haven't as yet applied *any* of your facts or rules to *current* affairs.

Now you are facing *realities* for the *first* time. You're no longer a *bottle baby*. Your *nursing days* are over. "Dear old Alma Mater" has *weaned* your mind and turned it adrift to *rustle* its *own* grub.

All things being equal, you'll have preference for and in any situation which requires *trained intelligence*, but you must start in the *ranks*—work your way up to *officership* by demonstration of *judgment* and *initiative*.

We expect you to *bungle* for quite awhile. While you have been digging in the *graveyard*—resurrecting the *bones* of *yesterday*—we have been dealing with circumstances which were not *anticipated* by your professors.

You scan *Horace* without a false accentuation, but you can't scan the *future* and *estimate* where the *next* shortage in raw materials is *liable* to occur.

You can tell us how *Winkelreid* held the *pass*, and recite the irregular *Latin verbs*, but while you were *stuffing* on *embalmed* wisdom, thousands of *immigrants' sons* were studying how to *hold* the firm's *country trade* and *scheming* out methods to reduce the irregularities of *production*. Your familiarity with the *Elizabethan idioms* won't weigh in the balance with our *ex-office boy's* acquaintanceship with *business terms* and *procedure*.

You can calculate by *logarithms* but you can't figure the *probable* trend of next season's *styles*.

We can buy *all* the text-books you've plugged through for about \$69.30 and your *personal* version of them, is worth just about *that* much.

But if you have any *new* ideas, if you can simplify a *single* intricacy of the *plant* or *office*—if you can employ your fund of rhetoric to advance *one* original *selling argument*—if you can introduce some *clinching phrases* in the Sales Manager's follow-up letters, we can *use* you.

We won't accept you at your *own* untried, inexperienced, brash and exalted estimate. Your notion of competence is based upon *probabilities*—we can find *plenty* of men with a *record* to their *credit*.

The factory tests *all* material to make *sure* that it will stand the *strain* of *service*. We don't take *quality* for *granted*. The *mills* are *constantly* delivering products *identical* in process but widely varying in *stability*. So are the *Universities* and *High Schools*.

You must *show us* before we give you a show. We won't buy you until we *try* you.

You're an Academic graduate but a *freshman* in our school.

We shall probably be forced to pound your *bump* of *conceit* into a *livid lump*—tear your false pride to *tatters*—but if you can be *discouraged* and *deterred* by a little *corrective* man-handling, you aren't made of stern enough stuff to *survive* in our company.

Now, pitch your letters of introduction *out of the window*, and turn to the *want pages*. Go out tomorrow and get your *own* job. Confidence doesn't ask for *odds*. True ambition will not use a *jiminy* to "get in." The youngster who exerts *influence* simply arouses *prejudice*. Employers and employes *both* resent the exercise of *pull*. When you don't *begin* by standing on your *own* feet folks are apt to believe that you *can't*.

Kitchener

THE Sidir lives. That bit of truck,
Lost somewhere in the ocean muck,
Was but a passing phase. He came
Awhile to teach the splendid game
Of sacrifice, and then went home.

His brothers held the banks of Rome
And fell upon the Persian sword
When Xerxes thrust a bearded horde
Against the Lacedemon will.

His memory will last until
The waters wash the cloud-swept hill.

They do not die—such men as he
Are scions of Eternity—
The children of the stars. His name
Is song deep in the throat of Fame.

Slang

IF you don't know enough words, make some. We need a few better ones than our present stock.

The English language is surfeited with polysyllables. The old lexicographers tore whole handfuls right out of the Greek and Latin to pad their works. Back there, at the birth of printing, just about one per cent. of the community were learned and those scholars took advantage of posterity and overloaded the dictionary with sonorous derivatives.

If the Hellenes had been a simpler speaking nation their descendants would probably dominate the universe to the hour. But their colonizing was a failure and their conquests futile because the barbarians couldn't acquire the language. No country can ever assimilate folk unable to learn its speech.

Don't resent slang. It is the simplified form of intercourse—the effort of a native intelligence to overcome the handicap of limited knowledge.

Some of us are equipped to express ourselves—have a full range of prepared pigments for the translation of any impression. But there are bright minds among the masses, so eager to paint their thoughts vividly, that necessity forces them to grind their own colors—otherwise they can't shade meanings.

Of course slang violates precedent, but so do faucets and elevators.

Precedent is the voice of yesterday—the best that the past could do for us. It's an inheritance of ruts.

Some old fossils regard all innovation as synonymous with desecration—but don't mind them. The world never benefited through their existence.

If you can manage to crowd a mouthful of sentence into a compact, reaching punch of a phrase—in the name of clarity and charity—give it to us.

Certain highbrows will resent your philological endeavors but they and their sort have bucked a list of originalities, from the globular theory of the earth's form to telephones and automobiles—none of 'em has loaned a leg to progress yet.

The most picturesque and succinct words in the vernacular were born out of the difficulties of brains groping through poverty-stricken vocabularies for effective symbols of intercourse.

Pity the Poor

THE old man who just rode past specializes in trusts, banks, milk and mush. But his cash is counterfeit. It won't buy what he needs. He can't digest his meals or his money. Would you trade places with him?

Well, then how about the blind man there on the corner? He never saw the sun flash on the hills of Dawn or looked on the face of his mother.

Or perhaps you think the old woman who owns your apartment house is a pet of Providence. But did you know that she is so deaf that she can't hear the birds chirping outside her window and not one of all the songs minted in the golden throats of the troubadours ever reached her ear?

Your boss is eating his heart out in the stark emptiness of a childless home, and his feather-headed wife has not imagination enough to find a happy use for her income.

Plutocrats like you must pause occasionally and consider the unfortunate. Most folks are not nearly so well off.

Pity the poor! Pity the poor!

The Molasses Attitude of Mind

INDIFFERENCE is the inveterate enemy of progress. There's no way to handle people who constantly sidestep issues, shift ground, yield for the moment, and forthwith lapse back to their old notions. Passivity is an impossible antagonist. Like molasses, it can't be marked by any method, but absorbs every attempt to make an impression and resumes its placid, unchanged surface.

Don't give a hangness is impregnable. It doesn't want to improve. It isn't sufficiently interested. It has an eel mind—no argument can hold it.

"What's the use," and "It can't be done," and "if," and "perhaps," and "We're getting along well enough as it is"; these are the little leeches which drain the exultant, red blood out of enthusiastic endeavor. Thousands of splendid plans die daily, only because of inert support. They can't get a try-out. Pessimism wet-blankets them.

You always stand a show with a man who takes a stand and combats you—when he's whipped, he's won.

But these human quagmires, these listless, slippery, complacent masses of so-called conservatives, simply smother the bulk of the world's new ideas. They're the trying problem of business men who can't get their broad conceptions executed. They're the curse of the Republic. Their thoughtless votes continually elect the wrong men to important offices. How can we wrestle with jelly-fish, or build with blanc mange?

Enough dynamite will knock down a mountain but a mountain of dynamite won't disturb the equanimity of a quicksand.

Nothing is so utterly exasperating and discouraging as the self-satisfied multitudes who won't bother themselves sufficiently to be convinced of their necessities.

Copyright, 1915, by Herbert Kaufman. Great Britain and All Other Rights Reserved.

